

Confidential

May 1, 1961

TO : The Honorable
John F. Kennedy
President of the United States of America

FROM : Senator Mike Mansfield

SUBJECT: The Cuban Aftermath.

The consequences of the recent incident in Cuba give us some guidelines as to how to proceed in the weeks and months ahead. The principal consequences would appear to be the following:

(1) Responsible world opinion was, to say the least, somewhat shocked by this episode.

(2) Significant Latin American opinion was hard-put to express a reaction which would not alienate us by criticizing us but, at the same time, would not put the Latin Americans in the position of endorsing our course in this incident. For this restraint on their part, the promise of the Alianza para Progresso, deserves full credit. Without that promise, Mexico, Brazil and others might have been vehement in their criticism.

(3) The most articulate support at home for our role in the course leading to the episode and the episode itself was Republican and the clamor for further action is largely Republican and, significantly, not the Senate Minority Leader or Governor Rockefeller.

(4) The incident showed Castro solidly entrenched and this was not anticipated. Oddly enough, Castro reacted with comparative mildness to the incident and this was not generally anticipated either. This would suggest that our sensitivity to this personality and to the Cuban people is not what it ought to be. The post-incident reaction of Castro, moreover, suggests that he might have been shocked, at least partially, into a realization of how provocative he had become. The mixed and mild Latin American reaction may have brought home to him the fact that he had alienated some mighty good people in this hemisphere. Finally, he may have been brought to realize how heavily dependent he has become on a far-away country and on a system which has become less and less Cuban and more and more alien.

It should hardly be necessary to add that the above analysis is highly speculative. Nevertheless, it is not an inadmissible hypothesis. The point is that we have not gauged Cuban affairs effectively in the past and we do not now really know the implications of the unexpected Castro reaction. It is highly in our interests to explore this reaction rather than merely to dismiss it curtly.

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(5) The Cuban exiles' reaction to the incident is one of bitterness and, as might be expected from our well-intentioned but ineffective involvement we are blamed for their frustrations. It will be a long time, if at all, before this same group is likely to prove effective, in any movement to unseat the Cuban government, with or without U.S. financial help and with or without strengthening by U.S. guerrilla-type forces.

Responses

Historically, revolutions have been successful in Cuba when a relatively small group of Cubans acting largely with their own blood and fortunes choose that decisive moment when the mass of the Cuban people have had a surfeit of an existing regime. That moment is likely to come for the Castro regime if it continues in its present ways. The small group that will tip the balance will find its own methods. If the circumstances are right, the group will succeed without U.S. help of any significance as, in fact, Castro succeeded and, before him, the revolutionists against Machado.

The problem for us is to face up to the fact that we have made a mistake. If we react in frustrated anger we are likely to intensify the mistake. It will not be easy to face the fact; political pressures at home to the contrary will be applied. Nevertheless, it is the courageous thing to do and the sensible thing to do. For if we yield to the temptation to give vent to our anger at our own failure, we will, ironically, strengthen Castro's position with his own people, jeopardize our relations with much of Latin America and do further damage to our position throughout the world.

This does not mean that the use of force on our part is ruled out in all circumstances. Here are specific situations in which its use would probably be acceptable to Latin America and world opinion:

(1) Guantanamo -- Force as a response to a Cuban effort of force to take over this base is essential even though the base may have little military value and, in other circumstances, its relinquishment through negotiation might be indicated.

(2) Force to prevent the establishment of Soviet missile or any other kind of base for Russian forces in Cuba, provided we are seriously re-evaluating our own base-policies on the rim of the Soviet Union.

(3) Force in support of other Latin American nations subject to a military invasion by Cuba.

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The key to the effective use of force in these situations, however, is its restraint. It has got to be clear that the force is adjusted in quantity to the specific acceptable objectives involved in each situation and that we are not using the situations merely as an excuse for a general intervention in Cuba. To those who would suggest directly or indirectly that they be so used, these questions might well be put: What if we do intervene directly and succeed in overthrowing Castro? What have we really achieved beyond, perhaps, a certain measure of self-satisfaction that at least we can stop the Communists in Cuba? If the timing of the intervention is bad, we will have a long drawn-out guerrilla war with substantial casualties and great costs. When it is over we will have to install some kind of government in Havana and prop it up with a costly aid program for a long time to come. We will probably have to reinstate the sugar quota. We will have, in short, a devastated Cuba, no closer to freedom and stability than it has been in the past and, brought to that point at enormous cost to ourselves and to the Cuban people.

If we eschew the temptation to strike back in frustrated anger, then the course of policy which suggests itself is this:

- (1) A gradual disengagement of the U.S. government from anti-Castro revolutionary groups; let them proceed on their own if they wish, without blessing or financial support from the United States.
- (2) A taciturn resistance to the political blandishments or provocations from those at home who would urge that we act directly in Cuba.
- (3) A cessation of violent verbal attacks on Castro by officials of the government, at least pending an evaluation by Latin American friends of his somewhat unusual reaction to the incident of the invasion. And in this connection, a little less vehemence in our refusal to countenance his suggestions for talks about our difficulties is clearly indicated.
- (4) If possible, let the lead on condemning the Castro government in inter-American meetings come from friendly Latin American countries rather than from ourselves. Similarly, let the lead on proposals for a boycott or other acts short of war come from them. We should go along with these attempts to pressure Cuba but we should do so with a minimum of ostentation and we should not lose patience if the pressures cannot be built on a hemispheric basis at this time.
- (5) For the present, abstain from and stall on but do not condemn in advance, efforts of significant Latin American countries to bring about a partial reconciliation between Cuba and the United States if they feel these efforts are worth making.

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(6) Push hard and fast with the follow-through on the Alianza para Progresso. Reorganize the relevant Departments and Agencies in the Executive Branch for this purpose. Assign outstanding men from the White House staff and elsewhere to direct the effort. This is the key to our relations with all of Latin America in the next decade, and unless it is turned, Castroism is likely to spread elsewhere in Latin America whether or not Castro remains in power in Cuba. The best prospect of preventing this spread is to render the soil of the balance of Latin America sterile to the growth of this off-spring of mass discontent. The Alianza para Progresso is a sound concept for bringing about the sterilization. The problem now is to act on its premises rapidly and sure-footedly. If it works, there is a good possibility that Castro will either wither on the vine and be eventually overthrown by the Cubans themselves. Faced with that prospect it is not inconceivable that he may try to lead Cuba back into the House of the Hemisphere or yield to someone who can.